DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 440 128 TM 030 740

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TITLE	Texas Effectiveness Study: Adult Outcome Follow-Up.
PUB DATE	2000-01-28
NOTE	17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southwest Educational Research Association (Dallas, TX, January 27-29, 2000). For the interim report, see TM 030 741.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adults; Daily Living Skills; Educational Planning; Followup Studies; *High School Graduates; High Schools; *Outcomes of Education; Postsecondary Education; *Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; *Special Education; *Transitional Programs
IDENTIFIERS	*Texas

ABSTRACT

The Texas Effectiveness Study is an evaluation of the effectiveness of special education programs and services in developing life skills related to the transition planning process for Texas special education. One of the three components of the Texas Effectiveness Study is a study of adult outcomes. This component was implemented in the summer of 1997. A survey was made of student records, and a formatted copy was mailed to each former student in the 842 student sample. Responses were received from 142 former students. Most of the respondents reported living at home with family, and less than half were employed at the time they completed the questionnaire. Almost half attended a college or job-training program after leaving high school. Most reported having two or more good friends, and most reported participating in a variety of social and recreational activities. Less than one-fifth of the employed former students worked 40 or more hours a week, and most reported that they had not received a raise or promotion since starting their jobs. More than half of the respondents expressed satisfaction with their high school programs in preparing them for adult life. Findings from the Adult Outcome component, linked with other findings from the Texas Effectiveness Study, should result in positive changes for programs and services for students with disabilities in Texas. (SLD)

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Texas Effectiveness Study

Adult Outcome Follow-up

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Paper presented at the Southwest Educational Research Association Conference
January 28, 2000
Dallas, Texas

TM030740

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Abstract

In January of 1997, the Education Service Center Region XI located in Fort Worth, Texas received approval to expand the scope of a project implemented by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in 1990. The project or group of studies is referred to as the Texas Effectiveness Study and is designed to assess the overall effectiveness of special education programs and services in developing life skills related to the transition planning process. The three components that comprise the Texas Effectiveness Study include 1) Adult Outcome Component, 2) In-School Component, and 3) Case Study content analysis of student interviews. During the summer of 1997 the first of the three components, the Adult Outcome component, was implemented and a survey of student records was conducted. Pursuant to this a survey was directly mailed to each former student in the original sample. This paper will focus on the results of the adult outcome follow-up survey with an emphasis on employment.

Texas Effectiveness Study

Adult Outcome Follow-up

What is transition planning and why is it important to students with disabilities who receive special education services in public schools? According to the Memorandum of Understanding on Transition Planning for Students Receiving Special Education Services (19 TAC 89.1110) transition planning is defined as "the provision of the services necessary to prepare students enrolled in special education programs for a successful transition to life outside the public school system." Transition planning enables a student with a disability to benefit from special education through meaningful participation in the planning and implementation of his or her Individualized Education Program. Transition may further be defined as life changes, adjustments, and cumulative experiences that occur in the lives of young adults as they move from school environments to more independent living and work environments (Wehman, 1992).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 made transition planning a required component of the Individual Education Program (IEP) for students who receive special education services in public schools. In Texas, the Individual Transition Plan (ITP) must be implemented by the school district before the student's sixteenth birthday. In 1997, President Clinton signed into law the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (P.L. 105-17, IDEA) to further strengthen the focus of post secondary outcomes

for students with disabilities. Consequently, a statement of needed transition services with a focus on the student's course of study must be included in the IEP by age fourteen. Both federal and state law stress the need for prior planning before a student leaves the public school setting in order to increase the chance of success of that student. Historically, students with disabilities experienced limited success when it comes to post-secondary outcomes.

As a result of evolving federal and state legislation and the need to improve the success of post-school adult outcomes Texas continues to support a project to evaluate the effectiveness of special education services of students with disabilities. The overall goal of the Texas Effectiveness Study is to gather information that will allow informed decisions to be at the state and local level regarding improvement of secondary transition programs and services that result in the successful pursuit of post school endeavors of students with disabilities

In January of 1997, the Education Service Center Region XI located in Fort Worth, Texas received approval to expand the scope of the original project implemented by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in 1990. The project or group of studies is referred to as the Texas Effectiveness Study and is designed to assess the overall effectiveness of special education programs and services in developing life skills related to the transition planning process. The three components that comprise the Texas Effectiveness Study include 1) Adult Outcome Component, 2) In-School Component, and 3) Case Study content

analysis of student interviews. During the summer of 1997 the first of the three components, the Adult Outcome Component, was implemented and a survey of student records was conducted. In January of 1999 a direct mail survey was sent to all former students of the original sample.

Questions for investigation are as follows: 1) What are the outcomes of students who received special education services during their high school years in Texas public school in the areas of employment, post-secondary education, independent living, recreation and leisure, and social and interpersonal relationships?; 2) How satisfied were former students with their high school program preparing them for life as an adult?; 3) What educational experiences have former students sought after high school?; 4) Did the transition planning process lead to sustainable employment in the community?

Methods and Procedures

In order to permit the scanning of returned questionnaires a 66-item survey was developed using Design Expert software and printed by NCS as a booklet. The survey instrument was formatted into sections pertaining to personal information, questions about college or training since high school, questions about employment since high school, questions about adult living skills, and expectations for the future. Demographic variables included on the survey were age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, number of children, and year graduated or left high school. A letter explaining the purpose of the study and the

questionnaire was mailed to each student in the original Adult Outcome sample of 842 students. The survey was mailed in mid January 1999 with responses due by March 1999. Due to the low response rate project staff conducted phone call follow-up during the summer months. Of the 842 surveys sent to former students only 142 former students responded yielding a 17% return rate. Results were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The 142 follow-up surveys were matched case by case to the information received through a record review survey conducted the last year of high school. The two data sets were then merged for further data analysis.

Results

Selected results from the Adult Outcome follow-up questionnaire are presented in the following tables. Table 1 shows demographic data for ethnicity, gender, and disability of the former students who returned the questionnaire (N = 142). Demographic data from the original Adult Outcome sample is also presented (N = 842) for comparison.

Insert Table 1 Here

Findings about adult outcomes in the areas of employment, post-secondary education and training, independent living, and participation in community recreation/leisure activities can be found in Table 2. For the most part former

students report living at home with family and less than half report being employed at the time they filled out the questionnaire. Almost half report attending a college or a job-training program since leaving high school. Most report having two or more good friends and participate in a variety of social and recreational activities on a regular basis.

Insert Table 2 Here

When asked about employment while in high school almost half of the former students report that they had a paid job in the community (42.3%) while almost a third (31.7%) did not work while in high school. A little less than half report being currently employed and most have had from one to two jobs since leaving high school. Most report that they found their own job (38.0%) or with the help of family or friends (12.0%). Less than one fifth of those employed report working 40 or more hours a week (19.7%). Most report that they have not received a raise or a promotion since starting their job. Health insurance, paid vacation, and paid sick leave were the most frequent benefits associated with current employment. The percent of former students who were unemployed but wanted to work was 33.8%.

Insert Table 3 Here

Former students were asked to respond to a question pertaining to their satisfaction with their high school program in preparing them for life as an adult. More than half reported that they thought their high school program did a good job preparing them (53.5%). A significant number of former students felt that high school did not prepare them for life as an adult (26.8%).

Insert Table 4 Here

Conclusion

The primary goal of the Texas Effectiveness Study is to gather information that will allow informed decisions to be made about secondary transition programs and services in the state of Texas. This paper presents a small fraction of the information collected about student experiences after leaving high school. As information from each interrelated component of the study is gathered and analyzed over the next several years it is the hope of the author that the findings will result in positive changes for programs and services for students with disabilities in the state of Texas.

References

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990. P.L. 101-476.

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Table 1

Demographic Information

Gender (N = 142)		Gender (N = 842)	
Male	60.6%	Male	64.5%
Female	38.7%	Female	35.0%
Missing	0.7%	Missing	0.5%
Ethnicity (N = 142)		Ethnicity (N = 842)	
Asian	1.4%	Asian	1.1%
Black	23.9%	Black	21.3%
Hispanic	19.0%	Hispanic	25.3%
White	54.9%	White	48.7%
Missing	0.7%	Missing	3.7%
Disability Type (N = 142)		Disability Type (N = 842)	
AI	1.4%	AI	4.0%
VI	3.5%	VI	2.7%
MR	19.7%	MR	10.9%
ED	8.5%	ED	8.3%
LD	47.2%	LD	56.5%
Speech	1.4%	Speech	2.5%
Other	16.2%	Other	13.2%
Missing	2.1%	Missing	1.8%

Table 2

Adult Outcome Findings

Currently employed (N= 142)	
Yes	44.4%
No	52.1%
Missing	3.5%
Attended college/job training program since high school (N = 142)	
Yes	47.2%
No	51.4%
Missing	1.4%
Current living arrangement (N = 142)	
House/apartment alone	6.3%
Family	80.3%
Spouse or significant other	4.2%
Roommate	3.5%
College dorm	3.5%
Military housing	0.0%
Group home	0.0%
Private or state institution	0.7%
Other	1.4%
Friendships (N = 142)	
Do not have friends	9.9%
Know 1-2 people	11.3%
One good friend	13.4%
2-3 good friends	24.6%
> 3 good friends	38.7%
Missing	2.1%

Recreation/Leisure/Social Activities

Listen to music	Go to a movie
Watch TV	Work or play games on the computer
Eat at a restaurant	Rent a movie
Shopping	Participate in individual sports
Visit close friends	Attend church/religious service
Read a book or magazine	

Table 3

Employment Outcomes

Employment while in high school (N = 142)	
Paid job in the community	42.3%
Volunteer	4.9%
Job training program	11.3%
Did not work in HS	31.7%
Other	5.9%
Missing	4.2%
Currently employed (N = 142)	
Yes	44.4%
No	52.1%
Missing	3.5%
Number of jobs since leaving HS (N = 142)	
One	27.5%
Two	24.6%
Three	10.6%
Four	4.9%
Five or more	8.5%
Missing	23.9%
Assisted former student to find a job (N = 142)	
Found job on own	38.0%
Family/friends helped	12.0%
HS teacher/counselor helped	7.7%
Adult service agency helped	4.2%
NA, do not have a job	23.2%
Other	4.9%
Missing	9.9%

Number of hours per week currently working (N = 142)

<10	10.6%
10-19	7.7%
20-29	10.6%
30-39	7.7%
40 >	19.7%
Missing	43.7%

Length of time at current job (N = 142)

< 6 months	26.1%
6 months to one year	13.4%
1 to 2 years	13.4%
2 > years	5.6%
Missing	41.5%

Received a raise (N = 142)

Yes	19.7%
No	33.1%
Missing	47.2%

Received a promotion (N = 142)

Yes	12.7%
No	39.4%
Missing	47.9%

Benefits associated with current job

Health Insurance	22.5%
Paid vacation	22.5%
Paid sick leave	14.1%
Retirement Plan	11.3%
Dental Insurance	10.6%
Life Insurance	9.2%
Other	12.0%

Earn enough money to pay all living expenses (N = 142)

Yes	20.4%
No	69.7%
Missing	9.9%

Satisfaction with current job (N = 142)

Very satisfied	21.1%
A little satisfied	18.3%
A little unsatisfied	3.5%
Very unsatisfied	4.9%
NA, do not work	25.4%
Missing	26.8%

Did high school experience help in finding a job (N = 142)

Yes	19.0%
No	39.5%
Missing	41.5%

If unemployed, want to find a job (N = 142)

Yes	33.8%
No	20.4%
Missing	45.8%

Table 4

Satisfaction of Former Students

HS did a good job preparing me for life as an adult	53.5%
No opinion about HS program	18.3%
HS did not prepare me for life as an adult	26.8%
Missing	1.4%